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Synonyms for the word break

By Ken Michaels, Guest Writer In Shakespeare's play "Hamlet," Polonius inquires of the prince, "What do you read, my lord?" Not at all pleased with what he's reading, Hamlet replies, "Words, words, words."1 I have previously described the communication model in which a sender encodes a message and then sends it via some channel (or medium) to a receiver, who decodes the message and, ideally, understands what was sent. Surely the most common way of encoding a message is in choosing the most appropriate words for the listener or reader. In Hamlet's case, he so disliked what he read that he described it elementally, as mere words, rather than a message. So I thought I'd devote a little ink to words themselves. "Nym" Words Have Specific Meaning Words ending in nym describe classes of words. Some of the more frequently used nym words are synonym (means the same as); antonym (means the opposite of); homonym (has the same sound as); and acronym (a word derived from the first letters of a more complex term, such as SCUBA or AIDS). Homo means "same," and hetero means "different." Therefore, if there are homonyms, it stands to reason that there are also heteronyms. While homonyms have the same sound but different spellings (like pair and pear), heteronyms are spelled the same but have different meanings and, often, pronunciation: a person who sews is a sewer, but a repository for waste products is a sewer. Sewer, then, is a heteronym. But the lexicon of nym words by no means ends here. One of the websites I visited recently2 lists no fewer than 26 nym words, many of which are pretty arcane and of interest to relatively few. Some are downright amusing. Do we really need a word to mean another word composed of two identical parts? If so, then tutu, pawpaw, yo-yo, and bye-bye are tautonyms. A couple of weeks back, my son asked me what is meant by a metonym. I didn't know, so we looked it up. In retrospect, I ought to have been able to logic it out, as "meta" means change. A metonym is a word that designates something by a word that is associated with it. For example, Hollywood is a metonym used to mean the U.S. motion picture industry, while the Crown refers to royalty, and the bottle refers to alcohol. My use of the expression "a little ink" a couple of paragraphs back is also a metonym for written communication, even when no actual ink or writing on paper is involved. The point of all of this has to do with precision in the use of our language. It will do me no good to encode a message using a word like metonym, or heteronym, or tautonym, unless I'm certain that my listeners (or readers) are familiar with its meaning. Either that, or I'm prepared to add the definition for their benefit, in which case I might have just used the definition in the first place. Still, learning the proper use of words, however arcane, can be useful, and if you like words themselves, even fun. What's Your Idiolect? In his book "The Half-Life of Facts: Why Everything We Know Has an Expiration Date," Samuel Arbesman3 discusses the changes in language that occur over time, and the two camps that see this phenomenon differently. He explains prescriptive grammarians as those who focus on the way words ought to be used, and descriptive grammarians as those who are more concerned with the way they actually are used. Arbesman asserts that every individual develops his or her own set of rules about how to use words, and that all of us—you, me, and everybody else—have our own personal idiolect. This delightful term describes our unique language and speech pattern, as determined by what we learned when we were young, as well as by who's around us, and includes our grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation of words, and even our accent. There's an important lesson here. If we're really going to communicate effectively, we need to be mindful that every time we encode a message, someone whose idiolect is significantly different from our own may very possibly decode it in such a way as to get a different message entirely. So it pays to be careful about our choice of words; is it really a message, or simply "words, words, words"? © 2013 Ken Michaels. All rights reserved. References: Shakespeare, William: "Hamlet," act 2 scene 2. Arbesman, Samuel: "The Half-Life of Facts: Why Everything We Know Has an Expiration Date," New York: Penguin Books, 2012, page 190. Ken Michaels, retired manager of Visual Communications, Leidos Biomedical Research, is a special volunteer for NCI at Frederick. Image: Stigür Mär Karlsson /Heimsmyndir / E+ / Getty Images Think back long ago to when you were in elementary school and your teacher first introduced you to the thesaurus. Now, once you got over your initial disappointment that the thesaurus isn't a cool new dinosaur, you thought it was pretty nifty, dandy and super to have all the synonyms (and antonyms) you could ever need collected in one book! And today, because the Internet is so awesome, you can even pull up an online thesaurus with a few keystrokes, making it even easier to find the perfect word for every occasion.Your teacher probably drilled it into your head that not all synonyms mean exactly the same thing. They're not interchangeable, in other words. You might describe a ballerina as delicate and graceful— perfectly acceptable descriptions. But if you used the synonyms frail, fragile or flimsy, you could wind up the unlucky recipient of a swift kick from a pointe shoe!So if you have a surfeit, a glut, a deluge or a plethora of synonyms in your arsenal of words, you will no doubt ace this quiz and be able to brag to all your chums, buddies, cronies and comrades! How much do you know about dinosaurs? What is an octane rating? And how do you use a proper noun? Lucky for you, HowStuffWorks Play is here to help. Our award-winning website offers reliable, easy-to-understand explanations about how the world works. From fun quizzes that bring joy to your day, to compelling photography and fascinating lists, HowStuffWorks Play offers something for everyone. Sometimes we explain how stuff works, other times, we ask you, but we're always exploring in the name of fun! Because learning is fun, so stick with us! Keep up with the latest daily buzz with the BuzzFeed Daily newsletter! "Two things define you: Your patience when you have nothing, and your attitude when you have everything." - UnknownIn your most difficult times, how do you define yourself? When I ask my clients this question, I sometimes receive responses like, "I am a procrastinator. I am lazy. I am overwhelmed. I am lost. I am not good enough." "I am," "Two common, yet powerful words—often the prelude to a psychologically harmful comment. Followed by a word that describes a negative behavior, they indicate that our actions actually define who we are. People often use these words to label themselves in a way that doesn't serve them well. During tough times, it's easy to label yourself as a failure or to believe that everything is your fault. Ironically, voicing and believing these falsehoods only brings more of what you don't want into your world. They can even lead to situational depression and to more of the behavioral patterns that contribute to the cause of the negative situation in the first place. Using this type of self-reproving language embeds the belief that you are your behavior, rather than someone who is not behaving in a desirable way. Once that belief is embedded in your psychological blueprint for living, irrational thinking is difficult to overcome. Indeed, what we carry to be true in our own minds is our only reality. A negative thought is simply that: a thought. In no way does it mean that it's the truth. Unfortunately, like riding a bicycle downhill, these thoughts easily gain momentum. Even thinking of yourself as a procrastinator will increase the likelihood of your delaying things. Instead, recognize that what you are procrastinating on is probably a tedious, frustrating, or ambiguous task. You can change your behavior by first recognizing that it's a task you don't like doing, or that you are unclear about. Putting distance between yourself and a negative definition of yourself allows your mind to create clarity and get the task done.Switching your thoughts and language to recognize limiting beliefs and actions as behaviors, instead of as a thinking of them as who you are, empowers to overcome the problem. Take back your power. Rather than "I am depressed," try "I am feeling depressed in this moment." The addition of the word "feeling" differentiates it from an identity. And "in this moment" tells you your brain the behavior is not permanent. It gives you permission to look at the behavior, accept it, and explore options to move into a healthier mindset. This simple awareness alone can be life-changing.Each day you'll move closer and closer toward actions that resemble success. Save the "I am" for the positive qualities within you. 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